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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S. ARMS SALES TO TAIWAN

¶1. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies focused February 2 news coverage on U.S. arms sales to Taiwan; on developments in cross-Straits relations; on the reform of the KMT; and on the year-end five city and county magistrates' elections.

¶2. Editorials and commentaries in the Chinese-language papers continued to discuss the U.S. arms sales to Taiwan. An editorial and an analysis in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" criticized the KMT for opposing the U.S. arms sales to Taiwan when it was the opposition party, and said President Ma Ying-jeou's tilting toward China has resulted in a non-equidistant relationship between Washington, Beijing and Taipei. A column in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" said Beijing has decided to adopt a tough attitude toward U.S. arms sales to Taiwan because it was both annoyed and frustrated with President Barack Obama and Ma Ying-jeou. Two op-ed pieces in the pro-unification "United Daily News" also discussed U.S. arms sales to Taiwan. One article said Taiwan needs to take precautions against a possible disaster caused by U.S. arms sales to Taiwan, while the other article said both Washington and Beijing are putting on a show, but Taiwan needs to shed tears of gratitude. An editorial in the KMT-leaning "China Times" said problems need to be resolved in terms of Washington-Beijing-Taipei ties in the wake of U.S. arms sales to Taiwan. An editorial in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" said "if China can brew such a storm over what is an arms sale that was meant to please all sides and minimize the damage to Sino-US relations, then the chances of Taiwan getting the weapons it really needs look alarmingly slim." End summary.

A) "The Taiwan Issue Is a Subject Involving the International Community and Must Not Go as Whatever Ma Ying-jeou Says So "

The pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 680,000] editorialized (2/2):

"The U.S. Defense Security Cooperation Agency finally announced an arms sales package to Taiwan over the weekend, including the Patriot Advanced Capability-3 (PAC-3) missiles. ... Having received this 'belated gift,' Taiwan really needs to study and figure out: How come the two most important main dishes on the menu that we want to purchase -- F-16 C/D fighter jets and diesel-fueled submarines -- were not served? What kind of truth has Beijing's stern and blunt reaction [to the U.S. arms sales to Taiwan] told us in terms of its Taiwan policy? The fact that Obama chose to make public at this moment his decision to sell defensive weapons to Taiwan, though not totally unexpected, has indeed reflected that the global climate is changing silently. ...

"Washington announced the five military items it wants to sell Taiwan, making sure that it will not become an outsider in terms of the rapidly developing political and economic relations between Taiwan and China. In the meantime, despite the dispute over [the U.S. military base in] Futenma, Okinawa, the governments of the United States and Japan also decided to hold high-level negotiations on the U.S.-Japan security treaty in Tokyo today. The two countries will also host a foreign minister dialogue in Hawaii next week to

discuss how to deepen their alliance in the face of China's rise and Pyongyang's nuclear problem. All these showed that the Obama administration, unwilling to make the outside world mistakenly believe that [the United States] is 'absent' [from Asia], has changed its policy direction into proactively participating in the Asia-Pacific region. This is a subtle yet interesting adjustment in terms of the dynamic balance in the region. ...

"The procurement of F-16 C/D fighter jets is essential to Taiwan's air force's plan to strengthen its air domination, and the gradual acquisition of the submarines further involves an overhaul of [Taiwan's] defense strategy. Both are about Taiwan's common national interests. How will the KMT, which used to criticize the Bian administration's [loosely] assembled and exploitive arms procurements, [National Security Council Secretary-General] Su Chi, who used to stubbornly oppose [arms procurements] in the Legislative Yuan..., and Ma Ying-jeou, who was then the KMT chairman, look at what they did in the past? ..."

B) "Washington, Beijing and Taipei Are Not Equidistant; Ma Makes the Wrong Chess Move by Tilting toward China"

Journalist Lo Tien-ping noted in an analysis in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 680,000] (2/2):

"...In the midst of the People's Liberation Army generals' criticisms against Ma Ying-jeou, the delicate balance between the Chinese doves and hawks toward Taiwan has been broken. China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of National Defense, which hold a tough stance toward Taiwan, were standing on the front line criticizing Washington and Taipei. The Chinese authorities not only did not stop them but gave tacit permission. This development all the more indicated that the thinking of the Chinese authorities has now changed, and Beijing is more confident now in its ability to change U.S. policy. For Taiwan, this is a serious warning signal.

"The Ma administration believes that it can strike a balance in the development of the triangular relationship between Washington, Beijing and Taipei, and it has constantly denied the outside criticisms that Ma is pro-China and tilting toward China. But this is just an image that deceives Ma himself and others. It is indeed a fact that China is growing more and more powerful, and the development of the triangular relationship between Washington, Beijing and Taipei is no longer as equidistant as it was before. As one party of this triangular power, Taiwan needs to make a choice -- namely, it is the correct path to lean toward the power of freedom and democracy, which will be conducive to Taiwan's interests as a whole."

C) "Beijing No Long Conceals Its Abilities and Bides Its Time"

Columnist Antonio Chiang wrote in his column in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" [circulation: 530,000] (2/2):

"... The United States has been selling weapons to Taiwan for three decades, and there is nothing new in the arms sales package this time; all of the items were long-pending ones, and Washington had also notified Beijing about it in advance. Unexpectedly, China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of National Defense, National People's Congress, and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference unanimously voiced strongly-worded protests and announced that they would suspend exchanges of visits [between the United States and China] for the time being and impose sanctions against the companies that sell weapons to Taiwan. ...

"This phenomenon reflected the following new developments: First, China's mounting public opinion and increasingly powerful national confidence have generated an impact on Beijing's foreign relations. Second, starting from the later period of the term of office of George W. Bush to the Obama administration, U.S.-China relations have reached an unprecedented new peak over the past six decades. China has particularly high expectations for Obama, thus its backlash is particularly strong. They thought they have seen major changes in U.S.-China relations, so they are both irritated and frustrated to see that the bilateral relationship is back to square one. China used to force itself to integrate into the international community and has been trying very hard to adapt itself to Western

standards. Today's China believes it is on an equal footing with the United States. But the [U.S.] arms sales to Taiwan was like pouring cold water on Beijing, and the latter's expression of its anger was a way purely to placate the Chinese popular sentiments.

"Another more important goal was to express Beijing's disappointment toward Ma Ying-jeou. ... Washington had notified Beijing in advance [of its arms sales to Taipei] this time. It was 'notifying' nominally, but in fact it could be also discussing, nearly tantamount to consultations. Even though Beijing condemned [the move], U.S.-China relations have actually moved a step forward. Taiwan will be really stupid if it is still feeling good about itself."

D) "A Storm Breaks out between the United States and China; Taiwan Must Take Precautions against a Possible Disaster"

Dr. Cheng Tuan-yao from National Chengchi University's Institute of International Relations, opined in the pro-unification "United Daily News" [circulation: 400,000] (2/2):

"The U.S. Obama administration announced recently that it will sell weapons worth US\$6.4 billion to Taiwan. Such a big move has immediately enraged Beijing. Chinese officials have quickly proposed four tit-for-tat measures, ... and it does not rule out the possibility of more powerful, follow-on movements. It appears that a storm in terms of the triangular relationship between Washington, Beijing and Taipei has suddenly emerged. ...

"As a small country, Taiwan is facing a dilemma when sandwiched between two big powers; it relies on security support from the United States and is in need of China's economic interests. Taipei is now negotiating the signing of an Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement with Beijing, and unavoidably, it is concerned whether the arms sales storm will affect the progress of cross-Straits economic and trade talks. Also, the growing tension between Washington and Beijing will pose a challenge to Taipei's middle-of-the-road strategy. ... Now the arms sales storm is causing disturbances to the rare [friendly triangular relationship between Washington, Beijing and Taipei.] The United States intentionally wants to prove that Washington remains the one that steers the triangular relationship, while China is attempting to resist with all its might Washington's influence on Taipei. Taipei, on the other hand, has to take precautions against a possible disaster by re-adjusting and pursuing a right position in the relationship."

E) "Washington, Beijing Acting a Two-Man Show, and Taiwan Has to Shed Tears of Gratitude"

Taiwan's former Ambassador to South Africa Loh I-cheng opined in the pro-unification "United Daily News" [circulation: 400,000] (2/2):

"The United States is highly capable of handling its foreign relations in a way that it can pick the right moment and pay the minimum price in exchange for the greatest benefits for itself. The weapons that Washington sold Taipei this time are worth NT\$204.5 billion, which is a very large figure for the ordinary Taiwan people. But in fact, the only effective weapons are the 60 Blackhawk helicopters, the C4ISR systems and the PAC-3 missiles. Washington was also ingenious in its timing. The generous gift [of the arms sales] was announced when Ma Ying-jeou's plane was still in U.S. airspace after he concluded his trip to the inauguration ceremony of the president of Honduras -- perfect timing. ...

"The United States had secretly discussed with mainland China the arms sales package this time. U.S. National Security Advisor General James Jones said Washington had 'transparent consultations' with mainland China about arms sales to Taiwan, and the 'contents that will be announced or not announced will not surprise China.' It is thus obvious that the 'solemn protests' raised by Beijing were just tricks to be shown to the ordinary people in China. The parties that offer things, including both Washington and Beijing, have substantive gains and look good, while the party which receives must still make a show of shedding tears of gratitude. ..."

F) Problems Remain to Be Solved in Terms of Washington-Beijing-Taipei Relations in the Wake of the [U.S.] Arms Sales [to Taiwan]"

The KMT-leaning "China Times" [circulation: 120,000] editorialized (2/2):

"... It appears that U.S.-China relations have seen unprecedentedly good prospects since President Obama's visit to Beijing at the end of last year. But the [U.S.] arms sales [to Taiwan] seemed to give the relations a sudden turn. The first question [we] want to ask is: Why did the United States want to sell [weapons to Taiwan]? The seemingly dignified answer is of course: Washington must maintain its commitment to Taiwan's security. But in reality, [the answer is that] the United States hopes to continue maintaining its influence in Taiwan. Washington maintaining its influence [in Taiwan] can be both good and bad for Beijing. The downside is that the development of cross-Straits relations can never get rid of the 'international factors.' When Obama was in Beijing in November, 2009, China originally thought that [both sides] had established the fundamental principles and that Washington would respect China's sovereignty and core interests. Now it seems to be a different story. Since Washington has sold Taiwan weapons, it is certain that Obama will meet with the Dalai Lama.

"But judging from Beijing's perspective, there are merits in terms of the U.S. influence on Taiwan. During the governance of the Chen Shui-bian administration, it was the United States which had restrained [Chen] and pulled him back before the cross-Straits situation went out of control. It is also a widely known fact that Beijing is concerned about the direction of cross-Straits relations in the post-Ma era, and it is likely that it still needs the United States to stabilize the situation. ...

"In the face of the rising China, the first point of clash lies in the Taiwan Strait. Even though Washington does not want to see itself being dragged into the conflicts in the Taiwan Strait, it still cannot let go. Judging from its own strategic interests, Washington also does not hope to see Taiwan being Finlandized gradually and thus lose its capability and self-initiative to defend itself, or being integrated into the sphere of influence of China. In light of this, selling weapons to Taiwan will help to pull tight its security link with the Taiwan government. ..."

G) "Billions Later, Is Taiwan Any Safer?"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (2/2):

"Though welcome, the US\$6.4 billion US arms sale to Taiwan announced by Washington on Friday will not bring much in terms of Taiwan's ability to defend itself. All the items in the package, with the exception of the 60 UH-60M Black Hawk helicopters, had been approved -- and then delayed -- by former US president George W. Bush's administration. In other words, since large parts of the package were first announced in 2001, Taiwan's military has been treading water, while China has sprinted ahead with the modernization of its military. None of the items in the package will make a substantial difference. While the PAC-3 missile defense system can bolster the defense of certain key targets, it is not sufficient to deter an attack, especially as the sale is likely to result in a decision by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) to add short and medium-range missiles to the 1,500 it already aims at Taiwan and step up its missile program.

"What is needed most, and what the US appears unlikely to provide anytime soon, is newer fighter aircraft like F-16C/Ds. With every day that passes, Taiwan's aging fleet lags further behind the PLA air force, which is developing 4.5 and fifth-generation aircraft that are far superior. As Taiwan's air force retires some of its Mirage and F-5s, among others, the balance of air power will only widen, both in quantitative and qualitative terms. Nothing underscores the lack of punch in the arms release more than the fact that the 10 RTM-84L Harpoon missiles and two ATM-84L Harpoon missiles included in the package, which cost US\$37 million, are for training purposes only. They are simply unarmed variants of the real thing -- RGM/AGM-84As. At best, the arms sale was an expression of US commitment to the defense of Taiwan, as per the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA). In terms of symbolic value, the move is welcome. But it comes short of providing the types of weapon that are necessary to ensure Taiwan's ability to defend itself in line with the amplitude

of the Chinese threat -- as stipulated in the TRA. It also comes in the wake of another announcement by Washington that it had downgraded China as an intelligence priority. ...

"In the past, when China rattled its saber over US arms sales to Taiwan, it did so over weaponry that made a significant difference in the balance of power in the Taiwan Strait. Now, however, after years of dithering in Washington, Beijing has become confident enough that it can throw a fit -- and make Washington pause -- over practically inconsequential weapons sales. This substantiates fears by some Washington sources that this could be the first and last arms sale to Taiwan under US President Barack Obama's administration. ... If China can brew such a storm over what is an arms sale that was meant to please all sides and minimize the damage to Sino-US relations, then the chances of Taiwan getting the weapons it really needs look alarmingly slim."

STANTON